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Report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund on the work of its first regular session of 2012

(30 and 31 January 2012)*

Addendum

* The present report, submitted as an addendum to the report of the Executive Board of the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) on the work of its first regular session of 2012, is a summary of the discussions that took place during the joint meeting of the Executive Boards of UNICEF, the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the World Food Programme, held on 30 and 31 January 2012. The text was prepared jointly by the secretariats of the funds and programmes.

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Joint meeting of the Executive Boards of the United Nations Development Programme/United Nations Population Fund/United Nations Office for Project Services, the United Nations Children's Fund, the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women and the World Food Programme

A. Middle-income countries: the role and presence of the United Nations for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals

1. The President of the Executive Board of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS) opened the morning session on item 1, "Middle-income countries: the role and presence of the United Nations for the achievement of the internationally agreed development goals" and invited the Executive Director of UNFPA to make an introductory statement on behalf of those organizations and the three others represented: the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women) and the World Food Programme (WFP). Presentations were then made by four panellists: Ertuğrul Apakan, Permanent Representative of Turkey to the United Nations; Abdel Malek Achergui, Head of the Division of the United Nations System for Development, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, Morocco; Ravi Kanbur, T.H. Lee Professor of World Affairs, International Professor of Applied Economics and Management and Professor of Economics, Cornell University; and Diego Palacios, representative of the United Nations country team and UNFPA representative, Mexico (by means of videoconference).

2. Following the presentations, the Member States, the panellists and the representatives of UNDP, UNFPA, UNOPS, UNICEF, UN-Women and WFP engaged in a dynamic, interactive discussion. Key issues raised by delegations during the discussion included the following:

(a) Middle-income countries continue to need support from the development community because of the remaining poverty and inequality and other aspects of their unfinished development agendas. A disengagement from middle-income countries would mean neglect of the majority of the world's poor and disadvantaged, which would be unacceptable;

(b) Multilateral engagement and the strengthening of partnerships with middle-income countries are particularly important because of the need to ensure that assistance to these countries benefits all categories of countries, especially the least developed ones. This entails the continuous importance of the United Nations and the increasing role of South-South and triangular partnerships, which should complement (not serve as a substitute for) North-South development assistance. The emphasis on building national capacity is of paramount significance;

(c) A modified country classification system is needed. No single indicator, such as income, can reflect the diversity of development challenges. Moving away from a universal criterion may entail creating a more refined classification of "middle-development" countries and reliance on multiple indicators related to

various facets of the unfinished development agenda: poverty, hunger, infant and maternal mortality, gender inequality and lack of access to education. In devising a new classification, the United Nations can build on the experiences of the partner organizations that already account for several indicators in their resource allocation systems. The harmonization of these systems across the United Nations should also be pursued;

(d) Heterogeneity among middle-income countries calls for contextualized, well-tailored and dynamic approaches. It is critical to ensure flexibility, following the principle that no one size fits all;

(e) Improving operational efficiency and effectiveness is contingent on the catalytic involvement of the United Nations in middle-income countries, creating synergies among the partner organizations and better utilization of resources. "Doing more with less" should build on best practices and their adaptation to various contexts. To achieve efficiency, a balance between the available core and non-core resources is essential.

3. The discussion at the joint meeting of the Executive Boards was expected to contribute to ongoing discussions on the development of a flexible, coherent and strategic framework for United Nations engagement with middle-income countries.

B. Least developed countries: United Nations collaborative contribution to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action

4. The afternoon session on item 2, "Least developed countries: United Nations collaborative contribution to the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action" commenced with the President of the Executive Board of UN-Women welcoming the representatives of the six United Nations organizations and the four guest speakers. The Executive Director of UNOPS was invited to present the relevant background paper on behalf of the six organizations. He highlighted the renewed focus of the 2011 Istanbul Programme of Action on strengthening productive capacities, on striking a balance in the allocation of resources between economic and social sectors, and on building resilience.

5. After the presentations by the guest speakers, six delegations took the floor, raising the following issues:

(a) The operational activities of the United Nations in low-income countries, least developed countries and conflict-affected countries should be strengthened, while the Organization's presence in middle-income countries should be financed mainly by national contributions;

(b) In strengthening the productive capacities of least developed countries, due regard must be given to ensuring sustainable production patterns and use of resources;

(c) Although the responsibility for the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action lies with least developed countries themselves, international support is key, including South-South initiatives. It is crucial to engage a broader range of partners such as the private sector and emerging economies including those of China, India and South Africa;

(d) "Delivering as one" must be encouraged, as it brings about greater coherence, transparency, effectiveness and efficiency and enhanced harmonization;

(e) The six United Nations organizations should work more closely with the Office of the High Representative for the Least Developed Countries, Landlocked Developing Countries and Small Island Developing States and actively participate in the task forces established to further elaborate on the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action.

6. The following points were emphasized by the representatives of the six United Nations organizations:

(a) The six organizations confirmed their full commitment to least developed countries and noted that the implementation of the Istanbul Programme of Action would be factored into the new strategic plans;

(b) The challenge of the next generation of "Delivering as one" is to further reduce the transaction costs within the United Nations system by simplifying internal processes;

(c) UNDP will continue to engage with countries in the extractive sector (including minerals, oil and gas) to support negotiations, income redistribution policies and trade capacity-building;

(d) Infrastructure needs to be embedded in the development agenda and can be a key factor in unleashing the potential of least developed countries. Effective support for community infrastructure such as clinics, rural roads, houses and schools must build on local knowledge and experience;

(e) Procurement can be a powerful tool for boosting local economies and promoting sustainability. For example, WFP is working towards more "local farmer-friendly" rules, while the United Nations Environment Programme and UNOPS have been working on sustainable procurement guidelines;

(f) There is a need to focus on delivery and on the identification of critical barriers to access to services, including in the areas of sexual and reproductive health, family planning and education, and economic opportunities in least developed countries, with a specific focus on youth and women. Monitoring and evaluation need to feed into sharper analysis and sound programming to facilitate learning from proven best practices;

(g) Social and human capital must be protected. For example, investing in food-based safety nets is essential, as malnutrition remains the single largest cause of child mortality.

C. Making United Nations operational activity work for accelerated development: quadrennial comprehensive policy review (Delivering as one, results reporting)

7. The President of the Executive Board of UNICEF chaired the morning session on item 3, "Making United Nations operational activity work for accelerated development: quadrennial comprehensive policy review (Delivering as one, results reporting). Following introductory remarks made by the Administrator of UNDP and the Executive Director of UNICEF, the representatives of UNDP, UNFPA, UNICEF,

UNOPS, UN-Women and WFP and a number of delegations engaged in a thoughtful discussion that provided useful recommendations.

8. Several delegations endorsed the focus on equity, with an emphasis on measuring results. They highlighted results tracking, the recently adopted principles of results reporting, gender equality results, the disaggregation of results and the importance of socio-economic indicators. One delegation noted that information on results should help inform the decision-making of Member States. Referring to the monitoring framework known as "the Cup", which focuses on achieving results by identifying and overcoming bottlenecks to progress, some delegations suggested that United Nations organizations in addition to UNICEF might adopt a "Cup" approach where appropriate. One delegation underlined the importance of results for areas beyond reporting, including planning, delivery, measurement, sustainability and accountability. It was stated that adherence to a results-based management approach would enhance the credibility of the United Nations system.

9. A number of delegations stressed the importance of solutions based on country contexts. Others emphasized the Millennium Development Goals and poverty eradication as being the highest of United Nations priorities. Also noted was the importance of coordinating — not duplicating — the various ongoing and upcoming development agendas and initiatives, including the Millennium Development Goals, the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development, and planning for the period after 2015.

10. Increased support for capacity development, the utilization of local resources, and enhanced South-South cooperation were also encouraged. Within the changing development context, some delegations raised concerns about declining core resources.

11. While noting that the process and the outcome of the Fourth High-level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, held in Busan, Republic of Korea, in 2011, had been outside the context of the United Nations itself, some delegations suggested that the quadrennial comprehensive policy review of the United Nations operational activities for development should reflect the Busan aid effectiveness agenda, including the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. Delegations also highlighted the importance of post-conflict and fragile State issues.

12. In her concluding remarks, the Administrator of UNDP outlined the priorities of the quadrennial comprehensive policy review: (a) affirming the relevance of the United Nations system; (b) recognizing the diversity and strengths of the United Nations organizations; and (c) underscoring the importance of coherence in United Nations development operations, especially on cross-cutting issues.

13. The Executive Director of UNICEF reiterated strong support for "Delivering as one" while noting that lessons learned from the independent evaluation were awaited. He emphasized that the continued funding of "Delivering as one" would require demonstrated results on the ground.

14. The President of the Executive Board of UNICEF closed the session by emphasizing that United Nations organizations needed to work collectively, with development as their goal. The organizations, he said, should put aside their individual mandates where necessary to concentrate on the core issues.

D. Transition

15. The afternoon session on item 4, "Transition", was chaired by the President of the Executive Board of WFP and jointly coordinated by UN-Women and WFP.

16. Introducing the relevant background paper on behalf of the six organizations, the Executive Director of UN-Women spoke about the comparative advantage of the United Nations in transitional contexts and the challenges faced in such contexts. The Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator of the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs emphasized that humanitarian response was limited in its ability to build long-term capacity and systems. The United Nations should support national compacts, and its organizations should work together around common priorities. There was a need for joint development strategies, and humanitarian clusters could play a role in capacity development. The representative of the Office highlighted the Resident Coordinator's role in delivering strategic coherence.

17. Member States welcomed the discussion on transition and stressed the importance of national ownership. They also emphasized that the United Nations was best placed to work on the transition from a humanitarian to a development situation, and that the Inter-Agency Standing Committee's Transformative Agenda 2012 was critical for success. Delegations noted that the United Nations integrated missions might impact humanitarian space and stressed the importance of selecting Resident Coordinators with experience in humanitarian affairs.

18. Delegations recommended that development planning start early in transition and called on organizations and donors to analyse, manage and accept risks. The need for better coordination among all partners was underscored. Delegations urged support for the compacts called for in the New Deal for Engagement in Fragile States. It was noted that flexible funding mechanisms were crucial, along with strong leadership and the rapid deployment of qualified staff with the right experience.

19. Attention was drawn to issues relating to peacebuilding and State-building and the importance of ensuring engagement on the part of the United Nations organizations and sufficient support for Resident Coordinators. It was noted that United Nations work in transition settings should be reflected in the quadrennial comprehensive policy review.

20. Several delegations highlighted the need to build resilience, targeting in particular the most vulnerable, including in middle-income countries. Delegations called for a common platform and joint United Nations programmes on resilience. Several delegations noted that transitions could present opportunities to promote gender equality.

21. In response, UNICEF stressed the importance of social services delivered equitably by national partners. UNDP highlighted the importance of governance and of addressing resilience in United Nations planning frameworks. UNOPS emphasized the importance of climate-related disaster risk reduction, rebuilding hope by demonstrating visible results, focusing on results and seeking policy coherence. UNFPA called attention to the need for better integration of humanitarian and development frameworks, to include recovery and transition work from the outset of emergency response and to include emergency preparedness, disaster risk reduction and resilience in country-level planning. WFP emphasized the need for flexibility in funding transitions. It underscored the fact that women's empowerment should be recognized not only as a principle, but also as a development issue.